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I.—*On the Prionochili of British India.*

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(Plate I.)

THE genus *Prionochilus* was established, in 1841*, by the late Mr. Strickland for the reception of the birds described and figured in the 'Planches Coloriées' of Temminck, as *Pardalotus percussus* (Pl. Col. 394. fig. 2), *Pardalotus thoracicus* (Pl. Col. 600. figs. 1 & 2), and *Pardalotus maculatus*. Mr. Strickland considered the affinities of this group to be with *Calyptomena*, "which it approaches in the structure of the beak and feet much more nearly than to *Pardalotus*." The name was derived from *πρίον*, a saw, and *χείλος*, a lip, in allusion to the minute serrations of the margins of the beak, which, however, are scarcely visible in some of the species without the assistance of a magnifying-glass†.

In 1865 Mr. Wallace described and figured‡ a beautiful

* P. Z. S. 1841, p. 29.

† Somewhat similar serrations occur in certain *Euphoniæ* (Tanagridæ) and in the Trochilidina genera *Grypus* and *Androdon*.

‡ P. Z. S. 1865, p. 477, pl. xxix. fig. 1.

new species of the genus from Northern Celebes under the name *P. aureolimbatus*; and more recently Dr. Salvadori has characterized another, from Borneo, as *P. xanthopygius**.

Thus far *Prionochilus* had been considered peculiar to the Malayan subdivision of the Indian Region, Celebes being debateable ground between that and the Papuan fauna. Last year, however, Lieut. W. Vincent Legge, R.A., a well-known worker in ornithology, sent me a pair of birds obtained in Southern Ceylon, which I at once recognized as belonging to this genus, and for which, at the Zoological Society's meeting on the 18th of June, I proposed the specific name *vincens*, in honour of its discoverer†.

Mr. Legge gave the following description of his bird:—

“*Male*. Length $4\frac{3}{10}$ ”; tail $1\frac{2}{10}$ ”; wing $2\frac{3}{10}$ ”; tarsus $\frac{5}{10}$ ”; mid toe with claw $\frac{5}{10}$ ”, hind toe $\frac{5}{10}$ ”; bill to gape $\frac{9}{10}$ ”, at front nearly $\frac{4}{10}$ ”. Third primary longest, only slightly longer than second.

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135— “*Descr.* Iris reddish; bill, upper mandible black, lower mandible lightish at the base; legs and feet blackish brown; entire head (except the chin and throat), hind neck, back, rump, and lesser wing-coverts dull steel-blue, palest on the rump, and with the bases of the feathers dark; quills blackish brown, the basal portion of inner webs, with the under wing-coverts, white; tertiaries, greater wing-coverts, and tail black, the former edged with the hue of the upper surface, the latter with the three outer feathers white towards the tip, the colour extending a little up the shaft on inner web, the next two with a small terminal white spot; chin, throat, and chest white, below which the under surface is saffron-yellow, paling at the vent; under tail-coverts white, edged pale yellow.

“*Female*. Length $4\frac{1}{10}$ ”; wing $2\frac{5}{10}$ ”; tail $1\frac{1}{10}$ ”. Bill slightly lighter in hue than ♂; legs, feet, and iris the same as ♂; head and hind neck faded bluish ashen, centres of feathers dark; back olivaceous brown; secondaries and wing-coverts brown, edged with olivaceous; quills lighter than in the male; sides of neck and chest ashy beneath, paler yellow than the male, mingled with grey on the flanks; tail brownish black.”

“*Hab.* Forests of the low hills in the southern province,

* Cf. *Ibis*, 1872, p. 379.

† P. Z. S. 1872, p. 729.

where it affects principally the creepers which entwine the trunks of the trees ; resorts also to small branches of low trees.

“*Food.* Seeds and pollen from the flowers of creepers.”

When examining Mr. Vincent Legge's skins of this bird it struck me that a little-known Nepalese type of Hodgson's, described by Mr. Blyth in 1843 as *Pachyglossa melanoxantha**, might have something to do with it. Upon reference to the British Museum Mr. Sharpe informed me that he had lately obtained for the national collection a fresh specimen of this rare species, which had escaped nearly every subsequent collector, including even Jerdon himself†. On comparing this specimen with Mr. Vincent Legge's skins, there remained no doubt of their being nearly allied, although distinct species. In all essentials of structure the two birds are exactly similar ; and *Pachyglossa* is therefore merely a synonym of *Prionochilus*, of which two species must now be attributed to the fauna of British India, viz. *Prionochilus vincens*, of Ceylon, and *P. melanoxanthus*, of Nepal.

Our illustration (Plate I.) represents both these species, neither of which has been previously figured, of the size of life. Figures 1 and 2 represent the male and female of *P. vincens* from Mr. Vincent Legge's specimens, and figure 3 the above-mentioned example of *P. melanoxanthus*, lately acquired by the British Museum, which is probably a male.

The latter species is readily distinguishable from its Nepalese ally by its smaller size, by the white extending over the whole of the throat, and by the white rump.

* Journ. As. Soc. Bengal, xii. p. 1010. This name is commonly credited to Hodgson. By reference to the original passage, however, it will be seen that the bird was described by Blyth, although he attributes the name to Hodgson. The single specimen obtained by the latter appears to have been lent to Mr. Blyth at Calcutta, and subsequently removed to the British Museum, where it now is, mounted in the gallery. See Cat. Hodgson's Coll. in B. M. (1846), p. 60.

† See Jerdon, B. of India, i. p. 378.



JG Keulemans lith.

M & N Hanhart imp.

1. PRIONOCHILUS VINCENS. ♂. 2. ♀.

3. P. MELANOXANTHUS.